

Writing a Tribute

A Gentle Guide to Finding Your Words

The impact of your words lies in the emotions they evoke

Writing a tribute can feel like a daunting task, especially when you are grieving. There is a blank page and the weight of wanting it to be right.

This guide is here to walk alongside you.

It doesn't offer rules, it offers gentle ways to begin. To remember, and to shape your thoughts into words.

There is no single way to do this.

Only your way.



Understanding What You're Creating

A Tribute, Not a Biography

A tribute is different from a list of achievements or dates. It is not a resume. It is not expected to cover everything.

A tribute is not a judgement. It is not a summary of the entire relationship, especially if that relationship was complex or difficult. It is an honest reflection of your person, separate from the full history you shared.

Instead, it offers a glimpse, a collection of moments, qualities, and memories, that together paint a picture of who this person was.

The goal is not to be complete.
It is to feel true.

A good tribute weaves together small stories, moments of significance, and the emotions these carry. It helps those listening feel something of the person, even if they never knew them.

And if your relationship was complicated, marked by distance, estrangement, or unresolved feelings, this guide is for you, too. You are allowed to grieve what was, and what wasn't, all at once

Note: Throughout this document, *family* refers to blood relatives or chosen family and/or community;

(Part One) Gathering - Beginning To Remember

Before writing anything, pause. The first task is simply to remember. Not in a structured way, but gently, allowing memories to surface. You might set aside a little time, or you might carry the questions with you over a few days. There is no rush.

Personality

Not in general terms, but in small, specific ways.

- What was their laugh like? What made it come easily?
- What was a phrase they said often?
- How did they stand, or walk, or sit in a room?
- Were they an early riser, or did they love a slow morning?



Prompt

Write down three small, specific things about how they moved through the world.

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If it feels too hard to access these memories, or if they are tangled up with difficult feelings, that is completely understandable. You can begin with just one neutral or positive detail, no matter how small. Or, you might simply sit with the fact that remembering itself is a complex act.

What They Loved

Passions and Interests

These are not just hobbies. They are the things the person returned to, the things that lit something in them.

- What did they love doing with their hands?
- Was there a place they loved to be - the garden, the ocean, a particular chair?
- What music did they hum, or sing, or put on when they thought no one was listening?
- Did they have a cause they cared about, quietly or loudly?



Prompt

Describe a moment you saw them doing something they truly loved. What did that look like?

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How They Connected

Relationships

The way someone loved and was loved often reveals more than any list of accomplishments.

- Who were the people they spoke of most?
- How did they show up for others - with advice, with silence, with food, with presence?
- What did it feel like to be in their care?
- Was there a friend, a pet, a community they were devoted to?

If the connection was complex, it can be just as important to acknowledge:

- What was the nature of the space between you? Was it silence, disagreement, or simply distance?
- Was there a quality you admired in them, even if you couldn't always reach it?
- Is there a memory from earlier, simpler times that feels true to who they were at their core?
- What did you learn from the relationship, even if what you learned was about boundaries, resilience, or the shape of your own heart?
- How did they show up (or not show up) in the world, separate from your personal story with them?



Prompt

Write about a time they made someone feel seen, included, or loved.

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What They Stood For

Values and Beliefs

Not what they said they believed, but what their life actually showed:

- What did they have patience for? What did they have no patience for?
- What kind of fairness or justice mattered to them?
- Was there a principle they quietly held to, even when it was difficult?
- What did they hope for, for the people they cared about?



Prompt

What is something they taught you, without ever giving a lesson?

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Moments That Matter

Finding the Stories

Rather than listing events in order, focus on moments that capture something essential.

These might be milestones, but they might also be small things that somehow held meaning.

- A time they helped someone, quietly.
- A shared ordinary moment that has stayed with you.
- A story the family still tells, the one that always comes up.
- A moment when they were simply, fully themselves.



Prompt

If you had to capture them in a single image (not a photograph, but a scene) what would it be?

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If the moments that come to mind are painful, you are not required to include them. You are looking for a moment that captures an essential truth about them, not the full truth of your relationship. A single, uncomplicated memory from their life, a story about them and someone else, a scene from before your time, can be enough.

(Part Two) Writing - Letting Stories Take Shape

You now have fragments, moments, small details. This is enough.

A tribute is built from these, not from grand statements.

Read back through what you've written. Notice what catches you. What feels vivid? What feels true?

You might see a theme emerging, generosity, humour, quiet strength, a love of life. Or you might simply have a collection of moments.

Both can work.

A Simple Way to Begin

Some people find it helps to start with:

- An introduction: who you are, and your connection to them.
- Two or three moments or themes that feel central.
- A closing thought: something you will carry forward, or a goodbye that feels right.

But this is only a container. If your thoughts want to arrange themselves differently, let them. The shape can follow the feeling.

If your feelings are mixed, your tribute can gently reflect that.

You might honour their strengths while being truthful about your own experience. Phrases like, 'He was a man of strong convictions, which shaped our family in profound ways,' or 'Her path and mine were not always close, but I will always remember her love for...' can hold both truths. You are not there to settle scores, but to offer a portrait that includes the complexity of a real human life.

Finding Your Voice

Letting It Sound Like You

Write in a way that feels natural to you. Not how you think it should sound.

If humour belongs, let it in.
If tears belong, let them in.
If silence belongs, let it sit on the page.

This is not a performance. It is a sharing.

What If You Get Stuck?

It happens. If the words won't come, step away.

Go for a walk.
Make tea.
Come back later.

Sometimes the best thing arrives not when you're trying, but when you're simply keeping company with your thoughts.

Speaking the Words

A Thought on Delivery

When you stand to speak, if your voice catches, it is not a mistake. It is raw emotion showing itself.

The people listening are not judging you.
They are with you.
They are grateful.

Pause when you need to.
Breathe.
Have water nearby.

The words will wait for you.

If you want to practice, read aloud to yourself, or to someone who will simply listen. This helps you find a rhythm, and notice any places that feel awkward. But there is absolutely no requirement to be perfectly polished.

A Final Reminder

There is no perfect tribute.

Only yours.

The person you are honouring does not need you to be eloquent. They need you to be you. The honesty you carry is what will reach the people listening.

That is enough.

And if your tribute allows people to feel the truth of your experience, whatever that truth is, you have honoured both your person and yourself.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said ... but [they] will never forget how you made them feel." ~ Maya Angelou

